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ABSTRACT

This study examined interest in and attitudes toward learning English among first-year nursing students at the Japanese Red Cross Junior College of Akita who participated in the Summer English Homestay Program at Monash University, Australia. The study was intended to learn about students' past and present activities related to English and to investigate the outcomes of the program, focusing on its cross-cultural aspects. Data were collected from two questionnaires and two oral interviews, conducted pre- and post participation, with 11 students. Researchers examined past activities related to English and present interest in and goals for learning English. Results indicated that the short-term study-abroad program positively affected students' motivation and interests. Students reported having more positive attitudes toward learning English and increased interest in learning about differences between Japan and Australia following participation in the program. They realized how important it was to be aware of the Japanese culture in order to understand the Australian culture. Results suggested that the host culture played an important role in promoting cross-cultural attitudes and improving English proficiency. The questionnaire is appended. (SM)

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ED 472 141

The Response of Japanese Nursing Students to a Vacation English Program Abroad

Erina TATEYAMA

Abstract:
This paper reflects the interest in and attitudes towards learning English of the first year nursing students at the Japanese Red Cross Junior College of Akita who participated in the Summer English Homestay Program at Monash University, Victoria, Australia. The purpose of this study is to learn about students' past and present activities related to English and to investigate the outcomes of the program especially in its cross-cultural aspects. The findings obtained from the two questionnaires and oral interviews conducted before and after the program will be discussed. The results indicate that a short-term study-abroad program affects students' motivation and interests positively. The results also suggest that the host culture plays an important role in promoting cross cultural-attitudes and improving English proficiency.

Key words: short-term summer English program, cross-cultural attitudes, proficiency

1. Introduction

A number of studies suggest that understanding the target culture is indispensable to second language acquisition. Spindler (1983) notes that the study of "education and cultural process" is "a new discipline" and this field is expanding quite rapidly. He states that focusing on education in a variety of cultures would be useful and helpful. Spradely (1980) postulates his theory of what is involved in studying other cultures: what people do, what people know, and the things people make and use. He states that these are three fundamental aspects of human experience that one has to deal with as a part of ethnography. Ingram (2002) emphasizes the importance of fostering positive cross-cultural attitudes due to the increasing mixing of the world's population through migration, telecommunications and rapid transport. Language is most effectively learned when it is used to communicate to achieve desired ends; through language learning, one can learn how people in different countries think and act. It has been two years since the Japanese Red Cross Junior College of Akita established an affiliation with Monash University of Victoria, Australia. The affiliation between the two schools started in November, 2000 with the intention of providing students with more opportunities to learn English and nursing as well as to gain broader understanding of a different culture. As part of the sister school affiliation program, the short-term English program was offered for the first time in the summer of 2001.

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The nursing and care and welfare major students participated in the program for 10 days. The following year, twice as many students joined the program for 3 weeks.

Monash University is one of the oldest national universities in Australia. It has more than 45,000 students across its six Victorian campuses and its two international campuses in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Johannesburg, South Africa. The Peninsula campus in Frankston, where this intensive English program is administered, has about 3,000 local and international students and offers courses in such fields as Business, Economics, Education, Information Technology, Medicine, Nursing and Health Science. The summer English program at Monash University Language Centre was originally intended for international students to improve their English both through formal lessons and through their many hours of interaction with host families and friends on the campus. Students learn spoken English, Australian nursing, and, through homestay, Australian culture. The students' intensive English course includes Listening and Speaking, Small Group Conversation, Diary Writing, Australian Culture, and English for nursing. During the program, students visit several hospitals in the area to learn about Australian nursing. The class meets from Monday to Friday, from 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m.

Subjects

This study surveyed the students who took part in the summer program in 2002 (n=11). They were currently enrolled in the Nursing course at the Japanese Red Cross Junior College of Akita with the youngest student being 18 and the oldest 27 years of age. Of all 11 students, 7 were from Akita. All participants were female nursing students. Three students had previously traveled to England, Thailand, and Korea but, for the others, this was their first time to go abroad. All the students started learning English at the age of 13 upon entering Junior High School. Four of the students had also studied English at a special language school in the Akita area.

2. Method of Study

In order to learn about the students' past activities related to English and their present interest in and goals for learning English, the first two questionnaires were administered at the beginning of June prior to the study-abroad orientation meeting. The third questionnaire was administered in early September, a few weeks after the program was over. The questionnaires and the collated responses are presented in the appendix to this paper. Individual interviews and open-ended questions were also given. The first questionnaire consisted of two main parts: the students' past English experience (summarized in Table 1-1.1) and their classroom behavior and expectation in learning English (Table 2). Questionnaire 2 (summarized in Table 3-6) asked the students to mark their present feelings and confidence level towards studying and speaking English. The tables below summarize the student responses.

Questionnaire 1
Before the Overseas Study Tour
Table 1 Past Activity Related to English

Item	Yes	No
Enjoyed studying English in High School	5	6
Listened to radio or TV	6	5
Studied in a language school	4	7
Taken the STEP test	9	2
Taken TOEIC or TOEFL	0	11
Talked English with foreigners	5	6

Table 1.1 Past Activity Related to English

Frequency of English classes at High school	1/week	2/week	3/week	4/week
Number of student responses	0	4	1	6
Time spent studying English at home	Less than 30 minutes	30 minutes-1 hour	more than 2 hours	none
Number of student responses	3	6	1	1
STEP test grade	2nd	Pre-2nd	3rd	4th
Number of student responses	0	4	5	0
Hardest part of English was	Reading	Writing	Listening/speaking	None
Number of student responses	0	2	9	0
Easiest part of English was	Reading	Writing	Listening/speaking	None
Number of student responses	6	3	1	1

Table 2 Classroom behavior and expectation in learning English

	Item	Yes	No
1	Comfortable expressing opinion in class	1	10
2	Comfortable asking questions by raising hand in class	2	9
3	Give teachers signs for the right answer	8	1 (2 no answers)
4	Enjoy working with other students in class	10	1
5	Enjoy watching movies/ listening to music in English	10	1
6	Want to work abroad	9	2
7	Want a job involving English	7	4

Questionnaire 2
After the Overseas Study Tour
Table 3 2.1 Confidence in Speaking English

	Item	strongly agree	agree	sometimes agree	disagree	strongly disagree
1	Enjoys speaking	5	4	2	0	0
2	Not nervous	0	3	5	2	1
3	Wants to study abroad	6	4	0	1	0
4	Able to discuss with NS	0	0	3	7	1
5	Able to express opinions	0	1	5	3	2
6	Wants a job involving English	1	3	4	3	0
7	Wants to host an overseas student	4	4	2	1	0
8	wants chance to speak English	8	2	1	0	0

Table 4 2.2 Changes Students Found in Themselves

Rank Order of Changes Students found (more than one answer)		Number of Students
1	Enhanced attitude to learning English	6
2	More positive attitude (Shyness was overcome)	5
3	Cultural difference	3
4	Broadened point of view	2

Table 5 2.3 Students' interest in Japan and Australia

My interest in Japan has...	Increased	Decreased	unchanged
Number of Students	7	0	4
My interest in Australia has...	Increased	Decreased	unchanged
Number of Students	11	0	0

Table 6 2.4 What Students found most interesting about Australia and its people (more than one answers)

Rank Order of Students' impression of Australia and its people		Number of Students
1	Family ties and affection	4
2	Australia's multiculturalism	3
3	People's kindness and openness	3
4	Eating habits	2
5	Early bed time	2
6	Shops are closed early, Doctors don't wear uniforms, drug abuse, Australian slang, water is important in Australia	1

3. Results and Analysis

Questionnaire 1

Before the Overseas Study Tour

Part A: Activity related to English in High School

The following discussion brings together the results shown in the tables, observations made during the interviews, and replies to the open-ended questions. The number of students who answered negatively about their high school English classes and teachers slightly outnumbered the positive responses. In interviews, 2 students reported that there was too much emphasis on university entrance exams. Another 2 students complained that there was not enough time to interact with the ALTs[1]. Two students answered that they did not enjoy studying grammar and one reported that her English class was not very practical. Students were asked if they had talked to foreigners other than the ALTs employed by their schools. Five had spoken to foreigners and 6 had not. Nine students had taken the *Eigo-Kentei-Shiken* (The Society for Testing English Proficiency-STEP). 5 of those who had taken the test took it at the 3rd grade level, and 4 at the pre 2nd grade level. The students were asked about what part of studying

[1] ALTs are "Assistant Language Teachers", i.e., English native speakers employed to hold conversation classes with English-language students in Japan.

English was hardest for them. Nine students reported that listening and speaking were hardest, with 2 saying writing was hardest. On the other hand, 6 students reported that reading was easiest English skill, 3 listing writing, and 2 students gave no answers. (Table 1-1.1)

Part B: Classroom behavior and expectation of the overseas study trip

Question 3 revealed that students use signs to show teachers when they are sure about the answer. Instead of raising hands in class, they let teachers know by making eye-contact. Two students answered that they don't say the answer out loud, but instead, they speak to themselves silently. One answered that she usually lets her teacher know that she has the right answer by nodding. Most students responded that they wish to get a job where they could use their ability in English. Question 7 also revealed that as many as 9 students were actually thinking of working abroad as nurses in the future. (Table 2)

At this stage, an individual oral interview was also conducted in an informal setting to learn about students' expectation of the summer home stay program. Most students answered that they hoped to learn about the different culture and customs. Six students said their main interest was learning about nursing in Australia. Four answered that they wanted to learn English. All of them answered that they had concerns about their stay in Australia especially about whether they would be able to fully communicate with their host family. Most of them raised their English ability as their biggest concern, but, in the third questionnaire, conducted after the program, they showed more confidence in their English skills.

Questionnaire 2

After the Overseas Study Tour

2.1 Confidence in Speaking English

The students were asked to rank to what extent they agreed that their English proficiency level had improved after the program. Eleven students answered that they now enjoyed speaking English, but only 3 students agreed they could communicate with native English speakers. As many as 5 students still seemed to think that they still could not make themselves understood in English at all. One student strongly agreed that she would like to get a job related to English, and 6 strongly agreed and 4 agreed that they would like to study abroad in the near future. Ten students answered that they wanted to host a student from overseas, and all of them said that they would like to find opportunities to speak in English. (Table 3)

2.2 Open-ended Questions and Oral Interview

The students were also asked whether they had noticed any changes in themselves after living in Australia for 3 weeks. 4 students reported that they had overcome their shyness after living in a different country. Another 4 students thought they had gained more confidence in themselves.

Two students mentioned that living in Australia had changed their point of view in many ways, especially because they had learned from the wonderful nature and the Australian people. Two students mentioned their listening skill had improved to some extent, saying they now enjoyed watching English programs on TV very much. (Table 4)

2.4 Commonest Impression about Australia and Australian People

Their overall impressions about Australia and the people of Australia are relatively positive ones. The commonest answer was that they realized how much love and family-ties are valued by Australian family members. They also thought that Australian people are very open, generous, kind, and easy-going. Three students strongly agreed that Australia is a multi-cultural country, reporting that it is very important to be aware of cultural differences especially in nursing. They all were impressed to find that Australian people are more relaxed and casual than the Japanese. One student reported with surprise that Australian nurses and doctors don't always wear uniforms. Other common answers were: Australian people seem to be more emotional compared to the Japanese people, people don't spend more than 5-10 minutes under the shower nor rinse off the dishes thoroughly since water is a scarce commodity in Australia, there are many drug-dependent people in Australia, and people in general go to bed early. One student answered that she kept comparing Japan and Australia during her stay there and always felt that Japan was inferior to Australia. Another student also mentioned that the Australian school system seems to be more relaxed. (Table 5-6)

4. Conclusion

It can be generally concluded that this short-term summer program seemed to have a positive effect on the students' cross-cultural attitudes. They acquired positive attitudes towards English learning and learned to value a different culture through the program. The findings suggest that students' interest in Japan and in Australia had increased immensely. Most students answered that they were able to find and accept the differences between Japan and Australia and they are hoping to discover more about Australia as well as other different countries and their cultures. One student said she had never thought about racial or cultural differences as she had lived in Japan all her life, but now she is interested in learning about the Australian Aborigines. The students showed their enthusiasm for understanding more about Australian nursing as well as Australian English. The results of this study also showed that the students now realize how important it is to be aware of the Japanese culture in order to understand the Australian counterpart better. One of the students said that living overseas had made her realize that she is "merely a student who lives in a tiny island country". Further research will be needed to observe how these motivational factors influence the students' future learning of English in the Japanese classroom.

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APPENDIX
Questionnaire 1
Part A: Activity related to English

Question 1. How often did you have English classes in high school?

once a week	twice a week	three times a week	more than four times
0	4	1	6

Question 2. Did you learn English from native English speakers such as Assistant English Teachers (ALTs)?

Yes	No
11	0

Question 3. How much time did you spend studying English each day?

Less than 30 min.	30min.-1 hour	more than 2 hours	none
3	6	1	1

Question 4. Did you learn English from TV or radio?

Yes	No
6	5

Question 5. Have you ever studied English in a special language school? (e.g. Nova, Berlitz)

Yes	No
4	7

Question 6. Did you like your English class in high school?

Yes	No
5	6

Question 7. Have you taken the STEP test (Eigo Kentei Shiken) before?

Yes	No
9	2

Question 8. If yes, which grade are you?

2^{nd}	pre-2^{nd}	3^{rd}	4^{th}
0	4	5	0

Question 9. Have you taken TOEIC or TOEFL before?

Yes	No
0	11

Question 10. Have you talked with foreigners (other than ALTs) in English?

Yes	No
5	6

Question 11. For me, the hardest part of English is

1. reading	2. Writing	3. Listening and speaking
0	2	9

Question 12. For me, the easiest part of English is

1. reading	2. Writing	3. Listening and speaking	no answer
6	3	1	1

Part B : Classroom behavior and expectation of the overseas study trip

Question 1. Do you feel comfortable speaking your opinion in class?

Yes	No
1	10

Question 2. Do you feel comfortable asking teachers questions by raising your hand?

Yes	No
2	9

Question 3. Are there any cues or signs you give to teachers that you know the answer?

Yes	No	no answer
8	1	2

Question 4. Are you comfortable working with other students in class?

Yes	No
10	1

Question 5. Do you like watching movies or listening to music in English?

Yes	No
10	1

Question 6. Do you want to work abroad in the future?

Yes	No
9	2

Question 7. Do you want to get a job involving English?

Yes	No
7	4

Questionnaire 2
Part A: Confidence in Speaking English

a. I enjoy speaking in English.

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
strongly agree	agree	sometimes agree	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	2	0	0

b. I won't get nervous about being spoken to in English.

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
strongly agree	agree	sometimes agree	disagree	strongly disagree
0	3	5	2	1

c. I want to study abroad in the future.

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
strongly agree	agree	sometimes agree	disagree	strongly disagree
6	4	0	1	0

d. I want to get a job involving English.

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
strongly agree	agree	sometimes agree	disagree	strongly disagree
1	3	4	3	0

e. I can discuss with native English speakers.

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
strongly agree	agree	sometimes agree	disagree	strongly disagree
0	0	3	7	1

f. I can express my opinions in English.

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
strongly agree	agree	sometimes agree	disagree	strongly disagree
0	1	5	3	2

g. I would like to host a student from overseas.

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
strongly agree	agree	sometimes agree	disagree	strongly disagree
4	4	2	1	0

h. I would like to have a chance to speak English.

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
strongly agree	agree	sometimes agree	disagree	strongly disagree
8	2	1	0	0

Part B: Open-ended questions and oral interview

2.2 What changes did you find in yourself after the overseas study trip?

2.3 Has your interest in Japan increased? If yes, what would you like to learn about Japan?
Has your interest in Australia increased? If yes, what would you like to learn about Australia?

2.4 What did you learn most about Australia and Australian people?

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